1: Messing E-5 (1953-1954)1957 MP5 Amhara MP5

423 614 of land settlement resembles the Middle Eastern (Arab) "musha's" land tenure.

No individual or nuclear family can sell, or otherwise alienate, "rest" land belonging to the kin group. He may ask them for permission to do so, but in Amhara provinces this is usually refused. On the other hand, if he moves to a different province (which has happened particularly since Menelik's borderland conquests), his kinfolk will hold his claim in trust so that a returning grandson can claim his rights in full. He can even do this, in some cases of particularly strong and proud families, if the inheritance is on his mother's side.

It is interesting that the Biblical principle of the kinsman-redeemer of the land is still in force among the Amhara, in the same spirit. Cases of this kind have arisen increasingly in the past decade, because of the emperor's efforts to settle landless squatters, who have worked fallow land and have paid tithe for several years. If such formerly fallow land belonged to "rest" kin groups, they try to evict the squatters through legal(or sometimes illegal) means, thus "redeeming the land" for the kin group.

423 428 614 For purposes of inheritance, landholding kin usually include all descendants to the "fourth house", i.e. the great-grandsons. After that, disputes usually arise. If no kin survives-- a very rare occurrence--the partners of the "mähabber" sodality to which the deceased belonged, have a final claim, before the land reverts to the regional authority. Affinal relations, except for the mate who shares equally with children of the deceased, are not considred kin for purposes of inheritance of land. If there are no children, the wife has user claims up to half the estate, which would have been her portion in case of divorce. [584]

671 The intent of these guiding principles and defini-
696 tions were to aid thejudge to arrive at a just verdict, preferably a "Solomonic" one. Guides were considered desirable, perhaps due to the absence of the principle of any law of precedence. The emphasis was on the "Code", and this was reinforced by the culture pattern of "literalness", in behavior.

In effect, however, these guides have enabled both draconic or bribed (and therefore lenient) judges to interpret the law with considerable subjectivity. Clever talkers-in-court never fail to use their ability to sway the public audience, which usually has a tremendous effect on the judge.

671 The effect of the "Fetha Nägäst" was to link the
777 church and state. There were usually 12 provincial chief justices, "wombär", in allusion, apparently, to the 12 apostles. The "Fetha Nagäst" ruled all marriage, even
586 684 the non-ecclesiastical "semanya" marriage outside the church premises. Divorce proceedings in the old-Amhara areas still can be carried through only with agreement of the "mänfäs agway", the soul-confessor, one of the priests of the parish, although no divorce is possible in a church marriage.

This "mänfäs agway" receives a small salary from the state; he can summon local state police if the accused mate has refused to appear, to bring him by force. If the divorce is granted, the "mänfäs agway" usually sentences both mates to a fine of Eth$5.- payable to him, on the grounds that both are technically lawbreakers for

1: Messing E-5 (1953-1954)1957 MP5 Amhara MP5

586 684 having "torn the marriage agreement". Furthermore, the woman can bring religious pressure to bear on the "manfas agway" if he hesitates in granting the divorce, by publicly ripping off her blue neckcord, the "mätäb", symbol of Christianity, thus threatening to run off to the Muslims because her mistreatment has become completely unendurable. Since the "Fetha Nägäst" also covers Guardianship, the "mänfäs agway" decides to whom children of a broken marriage are to be assigned: usually children under 7 years of age go to the mother, but an older child may be asked to indicate a choice. Boys over 10 usually are given to the father.

671 The new law codes of Emperor Hailé Selassie I are patterned after European, modern codes and are in the process of more comprehensive codification at present. What has been done so far will be described later.

675 B. Contracts, Oath, and the Legal Person, in Abyssinian Traditional Law.

A contract, called "kedan" (the same word is used for "Testament" in Biblical reference), does not have to be written, and usually is not. But it must be witnessed, preferably by more than one reliable person, preferably male. The contracting parties formally announce their agreement, then touch their palms lightly, (ej mätta). If the contract is a last will and testament, the Confessor ("mänfäs agway") holds the thumb of the testator while the will is formally spoken aloud.

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1: Messing E-5 (1953-1954)1957 MP5 Amhara MP5

7. Family and Kinship in Social Organization.

602 The emphasis on the extended family and kin relations among the Amhara can hardly be exagerated. In all problems of life the Amhara first turns to family and kin. While the partilineal-patrilocal extended family is considered of first importance, consanguinal kinfolk on themother's side rank only slightly less in obligation and duties owed by the individual, and in benefits for which he can appeal. In contrast, affinal relationships are regarded as considerably less important [428] in obligations and benefits,. This attitude is reinforced by the traditional law which emphasized inheritance in consanguineal relationships, even distant ones, over [584] closer affinal relatives; and by the relatively easy divorce from the common "semanya" marriage.

602 539 Proverbs emphasizing various aspects of kin relations abound and are constantly cited as advice in problems, and in "socializing " and "enculturating" the young:

"The liar to win over,
to his brother and sister appeal",

(i.e., do not appeal to the judge, whom the liar may fool; but to his siblings, whom he cannot fool).

"Quarrels within the kinfolk,
(are like) insects on cabbage",

(i.e. they do not strike at the root, are not really destructive).

"Relatives and medicine,
in days of trouble seek them."

606 instruct her to be a good wife; while a stepmother is assumed to have no such desire, and is likely to tell her stepdaughter not to"make so much fuss"over her husband. If the latter were to follow such advice, she would soon be criticized by her husband's parents whose residential hamlet she usually shares. Stepmothers are very common due to the frequency of divorce and the shorter lifespan of women.

606 628 Affinal relatives are expected to come to a person's aid if he becomes involved in a blood feud, particularly if his consanguinal kin are few or weak. Since there is no pattern of individual dwelling, even distant kin become involved readily, as a point of honor.

591 Residence of male persons is usually patrilocal-patrilineal, i.e. in the consanguinal line. But if a young bridegroom finds that his own father has little good land to allocate him in his parental hamlet upon his marriage, he may elect to seek better facilities by establishing residence at the bride's patrilocal hamlet. She is usuallyv very happy about this latter residence, for her kin will protect her even if she wrongs her husband (e.g. by taking a lover in subsequent years). Conversely, thehusband tries to avoid such a situation, for reasons of happiness as well as prestige.

562 565 which happens among middle and upper feudal nobility--may herself become the founder and sponsor of a church. In this case she usually appoints a male administrator from among her kinsmen, or a local cheqa shum headman, to supervise the sharecropper gabbar supplying her church. She then would also exercise direct or indirect control over the qēs gobāz, the administrating priest.

585 A commoner or peasant woman is much more exposed to the inferior legal status of women. According to traditional law, the "semanya" bond with the formula of the oath "May the Emperor die" (e.g. Hayle Selassye 675 yemut"), is not legally valid, and her contractual function has to be performed through a male kinsman. Nevertheless, her legal position is by no means as 586 weak as that of the Muslim woman. The Amhara woman may take half of her husband's movable possessions upon divorce, i.e. the cows she brought into her marriage and half the increase of any pooled property. To protect her somewhat from wilful mistreatment at the hands of her husband, a bride is given two male protective "best men", the "mizē"- but they are kinsmen of the bridegroom's!

Social inferiority of a commoner woman is also associated with her manual and menial labor, as hauler of water and hewer of wood or collector of cowdung for fuel, and similar servant-like chores inside and out- 854 side the hut. The baby which she carries on her back and breast-feeds for two years renders her physically dirty and often smelly. The commoner woman may not

1: Messing E-5 (1953-1954)1957 MP5 Amhara MP5

PART IV : The Life Cycle of the Individual

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Like many other societies with a tradition-directed culture, the individual passing through the age-grades of life is taught well in advance what his duties and privileges are at each stage.

The age-grades, though strongly emphasized in Amhara human relationships, are not as detailed nor as sharply divided from each other as in the case of the Galla of Southern Ethiopia (the "gada" age grades).

[854] The two-year breast-feeding period is the happiest of the stages for the baby. Infancy and childhood, for both sexes, are carefree periods of experimentation, which is sharply abrogated as adolescence, a period of authoritarian obedience, approaches.

[582] Even the first marriage of an individual, taking place at the very beginning of adulthood (even earlier for girls), permits only a

[586 587] minimum of individual choice. Unhappy first marriages are common, and so is divorce. But after this, the fully adult man or woman can assume a freedom of choice not known since childhood. They may seek second mates, change residence, join a different "mähabär", etc., and the grip of extended family on the individual is somewhat

[885] relaxed by the short life-span of the "elder" grade. This in turn permits the middle-aged adult to be regarded and respected as an elder himself, who not only is permitted a maximum of own choice, but who can and does rule the younger grades.

1: Messing E-5 (1953-1954)1957 MP5 Amhara MP5

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like to order me about?).

"He who talks before his father does,
his mouth will become like that of a leper".

Older brothers may discipline younger siblings, but there is less emphasis on the privileges of the first-born than in Arab countries. The Amhara is aware that younger brothers may often become more honored, richer and wiser later in life:

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"Formerly, he (the older) pulled his (the younger's) ear, later on, the horn of the other (the younger) became bigger".

586 In case of divorce, which is frequent, children not staying with one of the parents are quickly taken by kinfolk. Thus, children are often raised by their grandparents, paternal or maternal, who often are young enough to have small children of their own. It is not even rare to see children of a divorcee by her first marriage may be raised by the family of her second husband even after she has divorced and left him also. This is more likely to happen in a town, where the consanguinal kin ties are weakened due to absence of the factor of kin residence, than in the residential kin hamlet. (Foreign observers have paraphrased an old English saying and adapted it to this situation in Abyssinia:

B. Pregnancy, Birth, Circumcision.

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According to popular observation, 25% of all women, especially in the towns, are barren, and another 25% have frequent miscarriages. There are many precautions taken against these mishaps. A pregnant woman may wear extra cowrie shells, "zagol"; in addition to amulets written against the evil spirit "tela" (lit. shadow, an envious female spirit) which brings miscarriages, kills babies at

1: Messing E-5 (1953-1954)1957 MP5 Amhara MP5

583 585 1) the eucharistic church marriage, "qurban", engaged in only by a minority, such as some of the nobility, some of the older persons, and all of the priesthood; 2) the kin-negotiated ("civil") marriage, "semanya", sworn before the cheqa shum headman, and most [588] common; 3) the temporary marriage, for which the man engages to pay regular housekeeping wages, "demoz", especially common among those who travel to markets.

585 "Semanya" literally means "80", and is thus also called the "eighty-bond marriage". This refers to the oath which includes the phrase "May the Emperor die", perjury against which used to be penalized by what was then the enormous sum of 80 Maria Theresa Thalers. It is also called "bäserat", by"contract"). This is the most common form of marriage, dominated by a complexity of kinship arrangements (described in detail below), and divorce is possible through similar negotiations and "parcelling out" of both goods and children. There is a minimum of individual emphasis in this marriage negotiation, especially in a first marriage, for the kin of both sides must be satisfied and "honored", though there is some element of original choice through informal courtship. The church takes cognizance by sending a priest to bless the couple.

"Qurbān" marriage is not urged by the church on laymen, partly because of the sacerdotal character of the church, partly because the eucharistic sacraments are considered so holy that only serious, [586] mature, fully adult persons are advised to engage in it, and divorce cannot be granted. At this sacrament, the couple is rebaptised, and [587] may, on all church holy days, wear the "aklil" crown. Widows and widowers may remarry, but a priest who becomes a widower is expected to assume monkhood. The priest who blesses a "semanya"

1: Messing E-5 (1953-1954)1957 MP5 Amhara MP5

423 hind on the ancestral lands.
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361 This succession of events has taken place so often in Amhara history, that very few old settlements have remained on the same
[591] spot for even a century. As a result, many regional varieties of "patrilocal residence" have developed, and even "matrilocal residence" is not excluded, though most bridegrooms would shun such a fate. Also, the land tenure of the Amhara has become complex and replete with litigation, because of the amorphous definition of "byet", which sometimes emphasizes the consanguineal aspect, sometimes the residential, of kinship after marriage.

B. Problems of the Married Couple and Divorce.

● 586 When a couple has remained married for a number of years, people say they are "rägga" (lit. coagulated), stuck on each other. For divorce of a first marriage is common as the partners mature.

If her husband neglects her, wanders off, is a drunkard, or beats her too often, a woman may decide to initiate divorce proceedings. A man may do so if she is disobedient, e.g. wanders off to town without his permission.

587 If a man takes a "damoz" wife in addition to his "semanya" wife, the latter has no recourse in court. But if he takes another "semanya" wife, she can have him arrested, if she can locate him, for breaking his oath. She then angrily accuses him of doing a stupid thing, "you married one ox hump (shanna) above the other". He may be fined, but his first marriage may still remain valid. If a "semanya" wife hears that her husband has a previous wife, she often laughs, flattered, mocking the other woman by saying: "I married on top of her and not below" - for evidently, the man,

587 knowing both, has preferred her!

588 A deserted wife, angry that her husband has found another, will often take a lover to buy her "a sheep for Epiphany", butter for her hair, and cotton for her distaff.

578 587 The following relationships are called "gobban", rivals, to each other:

"Semanya" versus "damoz" wife;

Man A, whose divorced wife lives with man B. The men are "gobban".

Woman X, whose divorced husband lives with, or married, woman Y.

"Semanya" and "damoz" wives, versus new concubine, "gärad", fearing permanency.

One "gärad" against another, (also called "wushemma").

But only "semanya" wives are regarded as legal rivals.

842 586 When a woman is barren, she may follow the biblical example and ask her husband to take a servant girl, "gärad" to have children with her. A "semanya" wife may be divorced on grounds of barrenness, but "with honor", taking half of their communal property with her. Amhara peasants believe that women become barren in the towns because of "loose living". A woman divorced on grounds of barrenness will often have sexual intercourse with many men, hoping that she will conceive and thus have the blame of barrenness taken from her.

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848 A bastard, "dioula" has full inheritance rights if his father acknowledges him. Bastards are believed to be of violent tempers, like "Muhammad Gran" (the Galla Muslim chief who devastated much of Ethiopia in the 16th century, reputedly a bastard).

586 When suing for divorce, either partner appeals to the "mänfäs qubä" (colloquially "mänfäs aqwar"), the "soul-counselor" priest, who has jurisdiction even over "semanya" marriages. Only he can

1: Messing E-5 (1953-1954)1957 MP5 Amhara MP5

586 issue the traditional divorce, "mäftat" (lit. freeing, i.e. to marry another) dissolving "semanya" marriages. But before doing so he tries to reconcile the couple, quoting proverbs, calling on kin elders, postponing the case time and again to let them "cool off". One mate can summon the other before him by appealing to the "manfas gubae" to issue a summons, and if the mate refuses to come, police can be sent to bring him by force.

A desperate wife can bring pressure on the "manfas gubae" by appealing to him as a priest, tearing off her "matab" neckcord signifying Coptic faith, and threatening to turn Muslim. This is interpreted to signify that she is "nearly out of her mind with suffering".

If the divorce is granted, each mate must pay a fine of ETH$5.-, for technically they have "torn the marriage oath". The divorce is witnessed by the mise, the kin of each mate, and the chega shum. Half the husband's property goes to her, particularly of their communal property and its increase, except items called "gil" which they had agreed in writing not to divide and retain as individual property. Unweaned babies remain with the mother, also, usually, children below the "age of reason" (ages 7 to 10). The husband will often take older children, especially sons. If he permanently has injured his wife's eye, or hand, he must pay her damages, even if there is no divorce. The formula of divorce, pronounced by each mate, is "May the Emperor die, I have divorced you".

586 548 In rural areas and in the past, a woman almost always returned to her kinfolk. But since the growth of towns, many divorced women have been drawn to the easier livelihood of the "street of single girls" in towns, where they live in shacks, and serve as short-term

586 548 "dance" wives and innkeepers, offering bed, board and home comforts to traders and transients. By treating some customers well, they hope to find another husband. When no clients are available, they still earn some income by brewing beer and selling it. They wash themselves and their clothing far more often than peasant women, and pay servants to do the heavy labor and cleaning for them. They leave their children with their kinfolk, sometimes sending money. If she were to remain with her kinfolk herself, family pressure would be great for her to remarry quickly, very likely a more undesirable husband than the first.

587 If and when she does remarry, she usually has few of the social safeguards of her first, virgin marriage. There are no "mis" to protect her, the "manfas gubaé" will not be as sympathetic in marital disputes, and the new husband may take her far away from her kinfolk. But by this time she has matured, at least in experience, and is far more capable of protecting her own interests, economically as well as emotionally, than in her first marriage.

3. The Age of Dominance: The Elder:

888 The term "shemagelyé" signifies an elder; serious, wise, past the prime of physical strength but more energetic and persistent in determining and commanding human relations, particularly within the residential kin group, than ever before. He is treated with great respect.

887 He is one of the dominant elders who rule the kin group, parcel out land for usufruct to biological family units, make decisions in marriage negotiations and other personal affairs involving the family. In town, they act as judges on higher levels. Among the

1: Messing E-5 (1953-1954)1957 MP5 Amhara MP5

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Some women, particularly those possessed by the female zar Shanqit, learn to solicit money from strangers (as described during the convention). Some women thus gradually enter the path to prostitution, while others become independent businesswomen.

The attitude of husbands of zar-possessed wives varies and often is ambivalent. A rustic balagär often fears that if he refuses the time and money and sacrifices demanded by his wife for her zar, the neglected zar will take worse revenge (e.g. on his cattle) or will send locusts to eat his grain, or so distract his wife that she will set fire to the hut. He knows also that if he divorces her, half his cattle and other movable property will be taken by the wife. Thus it is cheaper to let her take an occasional chicken or, more rarely, a young goat to the zar. Some men, especially in town, are ashamed to admit that their wives frequent the house of the zar. Semi-educated men, who might themselves consult the zar doctor on some matter of business, forbid their wives to go there. This is more to protest a blow to their prestige than out of modernism, but they will divorce her if she persists.

X 794 586 798

A chronically unhappy marriage not infrequently ends in divorce by way of the zar cult. The "mänfas gubaé" is placed in an awkward position when the husband or the wife sue for divorce from their "semanya" marriage on the grounds of zar possession. For while as priest of the Coptic church he cannot admit the reality of the zar world, there is sufficient overlap between that and the world of evil spirits in which the priest does (unofficially) believe and against which he may himself, as däbtära, have written amulets. This explains at least in part why the Coptic church ignores the zar cult, and thus

X 794 798

4: Alvarez M-5 (1520-1526) 1881
MP5 Amhara MP5

business of petitions, and few are without wives. This causes many single women to live here, and when they are old they have another resource, for in this town every Tuesday there is a great market or fair at which three or four hundred persons are brought together; and all the old women and some young ones have measures to measure wheat and salt, and they go to the market to measure and gain their living; they give hospitality to those that sleep there that day, and also take care for them of what remains to be sold for the next market day. There is another reason why there are many women in this town, it is because the men who have plenty of food to eat keep two or three wives; and this is not forbidden to them by the King nor by their magistrates, only by the Church. Every man who has more than one wife does not enter the church, nor does he receive any sacrament: and they hold him to be excommunicated. For a year and a half a nephew of mine and I lodged in the house of a man named Ababitay, and he had three wives still alive and acquaintances of ours, friends in honourable friendship: they said that he had had seven wives and thirty children of them. Nobody forbade them, except the Church, as has been said, which did not give them the benefit of the sacraments; and before our departure, he put away from him, and from intercourse with him, two wives, and remained with one, that is to say, the one he had last, who was the youngest, and already they gave him the sacraments, and he entered the church like anybody else, and as though he had not had more than one wife. On this account there are many women in this town, because the men are well off and are like courtiers: and they take two or three, or more if it pleases them. In this country marriages are not fixed, because they separate for any cause. I saw people married, and was at a marriage which was not in a church, and it was done in this manner. On the open space before some houses they placed a bed-

4: Alvarez M-5 (1520-1526) 1881
MP5 Amhara MP5

separate persons, but two in one flesh; and that so in like manner should their hearts and wills be. There they remained until mass had been said, and he gave them the communion, and bestowed on them the blessing. And this I saw done in the town of Dara, in the Kingdom of Xoa.[1] I saw another performed in the town of Çequete, in the Kingdom of the Barnagais. When they make these marriages they enter into contracts, as for instance: If you leave me or I you, that one that causes the separation shall pay such a penalty. And they set the penalty according to the persons, so much gold or silver, or so many mules, or cloths, or cows, or goats, or so many measures of wood. And if either of them separate, that one immediately seeks a cause of separation for such and such reasons, so that few incur the penalty, and so they separate when they please, both the husbands and the wives. If there are any that observe the marriage rule, they are the priests, who never can separate, and cultivators, who have an affection for their wives because they help them to bring up their sons, and to harrow and weed their tillage, and at night when they come to their house they find a welcome reception: thus in effect or perforce they are married for the whole of their lives. As I said that they imposed penalties at marriages, the first Barnagais that we knew, whose name was Dori, separated from his wife, and paid her the penalty of a hundred gold ounces, which were a thousand cruzados, and he married another woman. And the wife that he separated from married a noble gentleman who was named Aaron, a brother of the said Barnagais. Both the brothers had sons, known to us, of this woman, and these were, or are, great lords, both are brothers of the mother of Prester John, whom all of us knew. All of us who were there knew Romana Orque,[2] sister of the Prester John, who is a noble lady married to a great lord, a noble young gentleman. In our time she

[1] Shoa. [2] *Rumanâ Wark*, the golden pomegranate.

4: Alvarez M-5 (1520-1526) 1881
MP5 Amhara MP5

586 separated from this husband and married a man more than forty years of age, who is one of the great lords of the court; the title of this one whom she married is Abuquer, and his father Cabeata. This is the greatest lord there is in the court. Thus I saw and knew many of these separations; I have named these because they are of great personages.
[587] And because I said that Aaron married the wife of his brother, let not him that reads it be amazed, because it is
[607] the usage of the country. They do not think it strange for a brother to sleep with the wife of his brother. This Aaron moreover had sons of her who had been the wife of his brother, and he left her and married another to whom he is now married.

CAP. XXII.—*Of the manner of baptism and circumcision, and how they carry the dead to their burial.*

304 Circumcision is done by anybody without any ceremony, only they say that so they find it written in the books, that God commanded circumcision. And let not the reader of this be amazed—they also circumcise the females as well as the males, which was not in the Old Law. Baptism they do
851 in this manner: they baptize males at forty days, and females at sixty days after their birth, and if they die before they go without baptism. I, many times and in many places, used to tell them that they committed a great error, and went against what the Gospel says: Quod natum est ex carne caro est; et quod natum est ex spiritu spiritus est. They answered me many times that the faith of their mother sufficed for them, and the communion which she received whilst in a state of pregnancy.[1] They perform this baptism

[1] This opinion of the Abyssinians appears to have anticipated the Sorbonne judgment of 1733, given in the 20th chapter of *Tristram Shandy*.

5: Bruce T-5 (1768-1773) 1804
MP5 Amhara MP5

for the said goods; which is some one of his friends that pre- 584
sents himself, and becomes answerable for him in case he should wish to dismiss his wife, and be not able, through dissipation, or otherwise, to restore all that he has gotten.

Further, at the time when they display the fortune of the bride, the husband is obliged to promise a certain sum of money, or an equivalent in effects, to his wife, in case he should chuse to abandon her, or separate himself from her. This must also be confirmed by an oath of the future husband, and of his surety. A certain time, of twenty or thirty days, is determined also by a reciprocal oath, that on the last of these they will go together to church, and receive the sacrament. When all these matters are concluded, the future spouse appoints the marriage-day, and then returns home. When 585
that day arrives, the intended husband goes again to his bride's house, where she appears, and shews him her moveables (mobiglia), or clothes; and he must promise and swear a-new the fore-mentioned articles; and that he will use his wife well; never leave her without meat, or cloathing; keep her in a good house, &c. all which his surety must confirm. When this is over, the bridegroom takes his lady on his shoulders, and carries her off to his house. If it be at a distance, he does the same thing, but only goes entirely round about the bride's house; then sets her down, and returns her into it. After this ceremony, a solemn banquet takes place, consisting of raw beef and bread, and honey-wine, or hydromel, or another beveridge from grain, called bouza, a sort of beer very sour and disgusting. The feast being ended, the parties mount each a mule, and ride to the bridegroom's house, where is concluded all the ceremony necessary to marriage before they live together. When they have lived together during the appointed term of twenty or thirty days, they must both appear at church, and declare before the priest that they are husband and wife, and that they are come to receive the sacrament. The priest, without more ado, celebrates mass; they communicate, and return home.

After some time, although both have sworn to live all 586
their life faithful to one another, they take the liberty to separate; if it is the husband who wishes to get off, he, or his surety, must pay the wife that which she brought, and

[p. 49]

5: Bruce T-5 (1768-1773) 1804
MP5 Amhara MP5

586 likewise the sum stipulated in case of separation. If they have had children, the boys always go with the mother, even if there were but an only child; if there be no boys, she takes none of the girls. When the separation comes from the lady, the husband is liable to no restitution, provided he has been always faithful to the married state, as promised; but if it is on account of his bad conduct, or irregular life, that she forms this resolution, he is always subject to his promise and the above-mentioned articles.

It sometimes happens that the husband and wife, mutually, without any cause of ill-will, agree to part; in this case, the effects brought by the wife are united with the sum stipulated by the husband; then divided into equal shares, of which the parties take each one, and return to their former places of abode.

585 This is the established form of those marriages which are said to be celebrated justly, and according to the church. But, with regard to inferior people, these seldom take place; in proof of which I can mention what a person of credit asserted, who had lived twenty-five years in this country. He affirmed, that in all that time he had not seen, nor known, of a marriage at the church, in the places where he lived, except one single instance. I may add to his the testimony of a priest in Tigre, who swore solemnly, that in all Addua, the capital of that province, he was the only man who was married according to the church, that is, in the forementioned manner.

The ordinary way of marrying is this: When two persons ****. Here the MS. breaks off; L. Balugani having been either interrupted, or weary of the subject. It is to be regretted, that he has not given the manner in which the bulk of a nation, very little influenced by Christianity, perform one of the most essential ceremonies in life. His account of the marriage of the church is confirmed by Gregory of Hagara-Christos, in Ludolph's Abyssinian History and Commentary.

It may be gathered from various hints in Mr Bruce's papers, that the Abyssinian peasants and soldiers marry in a few minutes. No settlement, portion, or surety, being necessary, they eat an ox, or two or three sheep raw; the favourite method of cutting pieces from them, while alive, being

8: Rey G-5 (1910-1920)1935
MP5 Amhara MP5

CHAPTER V

SOME OF THEIR HABITS & CUSTOMS—(*continued*)

As the people are Christians they are of course monogamists, but though they have only one wife at a time, they often have, unfortunately for the race, many wives one after the other, and as a natural corollary the women have a series of husbands. This is due to their appallingly lax marriage laws and to the ridiculous facilities for divorce, advantages which do not apply to the Gallas, who "enjoy" two or three or more wives at a time, but then they are not Christians.

Marriage amongst the Abyssinians exists in three forms. Firstly, the man selects a bride, and without any form of ceremony they live together, he supplying her with small amounts of money in addition to a home and the necessaries of life, and when either of them so desires they come to a mutual agreement and separate as easily as they united.

Secondly, there is the civil marriage. In this case there is a contract made before the *Shum* (or "Mayor") when the properties of the would-be bride and bridegroom are specified, and an arrangement is made as to division in case of divorce, though usually they agree to divide things equally. In the event of divorce this division is carried out to the letter, and should there, for example, be amongst other things only one cooking pot, this is halved. When a woman has been "married"

8: Rey G-5 (1910-1920)1935
MP5 Amhara MP5

and divorced in this manner two or three times she is considered rather a "catch", on account perhaps of her worldly possessions which she has acquired from her previous matrimonial ventures. Then if she does not retire from the world and become a kind of nun she often indulges in the third form of marriage, a solemn religious ceremony which is really binding; it is as a general rule confined to the better class of Abyssinians.

Women, some of whom are attractive and even pretty, have, speaking generally, little or no position. There are of course exceptions to this rule, and I have known cases where a wife has by her influence over her husband acquired a certain status for herself. But this is rare, and by a general though not universal rule women are even supposed to eat separately.

Nevertheless the higher-class woman manages to hold her own, and if badly treated by her husband has the right of appeal to the Church. And so far as I can gather the woman of any class can divorce her husband as easily as he can divorce her, which gives her a certain protection in itself.

In spite of the facility of divorce—possibly to some extent because of the mutual power to exercise it—the lot of women is not at all what one might expect; they are by no means the hewers of wood and drawers of water that one finds so extensively in Africa. They do little or no work, neither washing nor mending their husbands' clothes nor cooking; all this is done by Gourages or others of whom one or more is to be found in almost every household—other than the very poorest—and even amongst one's own servants, acting as "gentlemen's gentlemen".

Women of the upper classes are still to some ex-

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

Loyalty is proclaimed all around. Conviviality is the norm among peers, though the authoritarian character of the Amhara family inhibits camaraderie between those of greatly differing ages. Unlimited succor in time of sickness and death and profuse commensality in happier hours are important values to the Amhara peasant and ones about which he is self-conscious and articulate.

Reverence for one's fathers is perhaps the key legitimating principle in the structure of Amhara morality. This is the outgrowth and foundation of a social system which makes children devoted servants of their fathers and keeps men under their fathers' control until they are fully adult. The fierce loyalty to the symbols and practices of the church is experienced as being true to "the faith of our fathers," and it is an analogous devotion to "the land of our fathers" that moves the Amhara to a steadfast defense of his hereditary farmland and the borders of his country.

The chief areas of conflict within the Amhara peasant's conception of the good life are those of sex and aggression. These conflicts appear to reflect the mixture of Christian and pagan cultures in Abyssinian history. From Christianity come beliefs that marriage is sacred, divorce is not legitimate, and adultery is taboo. The Amhara peasant, while respecting the embodiment of these norms in the lives of priests, feels justified in having sexual relations outside marriage and in getting a divorce whenever the need arises. Perhaps it can be argued that this represents a conflict between norms and practice, but the legitimate tone of the non-Christian behavior suggests that it might well be considered an alternative norm, a carry-over from the ancient culture which legitimized polygamy.

Attitudes concerning the use of violence represent a clear instance of conflict of norms. The precepts "Do not kill" and "Love thy neighbor," though not regarded as constituting the crux of Christian ethics, are known and acknowledged in Abyssinia. The rare priest or elder who embodies the classic ideal of Christian love is appreciated as a man of the highest virtue. The fearless killer, on the other hand, embodies another ideal of no less importance—that of being *guabaz*, brave and manly. The peasant who assaults his neighbor because the latter has usurped his land, committed adultery with his wife, injured his *xamad*, or insulted him grievously is following an ethic of cardinal importance in Amhara culture.[14]

The Central Confrontation

The foregoing has indicated some of the main concepts through which the Amhara peasant perceives the common objects of human experience, and what meaning they have for him. Since it is an exploratory account, it lacks the unity that would come from the consistent application of a rigorous observational procedure or of a coherent, analytic conceptual scheme. Yet even at the present stage of inquiry it is possible to move toward a more unified stra-

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

For the groom, too, marriage means a gratifying boost toward adult status, symbolized by his receiving from the bride's parents distinctively adult male possessions—a *ḳutā*, perhaps a *barnos*, and a rifle if they can afford it.

Such is the basic pattern of betrothal and marriage among the Amhara, though many of the details vary from province to province.[6] There are, in addition, certain traditional alternatives to this standard procedure. One of these involves the solemnization of the marriage oath by taking Communion, a rite necessary for a marriage to be counted as legal by the Church, and followed by the ordained clergy and the most pious families. Another form requires no oath at all; the husband is simply expected to provide a salary and clothes for his wife. This procedure is followed chiefly by soldiers and traders, and by those who are marrying for the second time.

Still another type of marriage is that known as *ḳoṭ assīr* ("ten beds") in which the boy goes to live with the girl's family while both are quite young. In this case the boy has his work apprenticeship under the girl's father. After several years, when the girl reaches puberty, a second wedding ceremony will take place—this time at the home of the groom's parents—and the union will be consummated. This type of arrangement tends to be made when the boy's family is too poor to provide enough to get him started on his own, or if the girl's father has no son to help him with the work.

There is, finally, a form of marriage by abduction. If the girl's father does not grant the request of the emissaries of the boy's father, and if the boy's father is still interested, the boy may go with two or three friends to capture her when she is on the way to market or fetching water. When this happens, the couple will approach the girl's parents after they have been married for some time and seek a reconciliation. Occasionally poor families have deliberate recourse to this form of marriage, arranging in advance a bride capture so as to avoid having to prepare the expensive wedding feasts.[7]

Although marriage marks the termination of childhood for the Amhara, it does not by itself signify the full attainment of adulthood. The newly wed couple lives at first in the home of the boy's father, and to truly "arrive" they must establish their own separate household. If the boy's family is wealthy, he may have his own house ready by the time of the wedding. More often, the couple spends a certain amount of time—a few months, or in some cases as much as two or three years—living in the home of the groom's father until their own house is built. To tarry unduly in the father's house, however, is considered a mark of laziness and a great shame.

Furthermore, because of the somewhat arbitrary manner in which the spouses are chosen for each other, there is often a serious problem of post-marital adjustment, a problem not rendered any less difficult by the proximity of the girl's mother-in-law. The divorce pattern is well known among

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

the Amhara. Both partners enter the marriage with the full understanding that if they do not get along they will be able to separate without much difficulty, each partner taking half the goods that were accumulated during the marriage as well as the land and other private property each brought into the marriage. Only after several years of married life, which have resulted in children, and probably a separation followed by rapprochement or else divorce and remarriage, is the Amhara defined by his culture as a complete adult, a *mulu sĕt* or *mulu saw*.

From Generation to Generation

Through the agency of his family of orientation, then, the Amhara adolescent automatically is prepared for adult work responsibilities and launched into married life. Continuity of the social system, however, also depends on the maintenance of a moral order that transcends the narrow commitments of kinship units. What of those sentiments that should dispose the young Amhara to conform with the more general norms of adult society?

The Abyssinian moral order rests primarily upon two pillars: the profession of Christianity and the institution of respect. These dispositions are firmly implanted during childhood and receive steady reinforcement during the transition to adulthood.

Maintenance of the fasting and dietary laws appears to be the central symbol of Christian identity in Amhara culture. Here again one may discern a pattern of progressively increased inculcation of norms throughout maturation. The taboos against pork and other unclean foods are taught at an early age and supported by references to unclean heathens ever after. More important, the Amhara learns step by step how to chasten his stomach in the traditional way. As soon as he is old enough to observe what goes on in his home, he is aware that meat products are not served to anyone on fasting days. Around the age of seven he begins his first regular fast, which means avoiding all food before noon, by observing the sixteen-day fast of *Felsatä*. The Wednesday and Friday fasts are supposed to be observed following this, though in practice it may be a few more years before the child keeps these weekly fasts regularly. Observance of the most trying fast of all, the eight-week fast of Lent, begins at about the age of fifteen.

At the same time, the adolescent comes increasingly under the jurisdiction of a member of the ordained clergy known as his *nafs abbät* ("soul-father" or confessor). This is particularly so after marriage, when the young man may either continue to be attached to the soul-father of his own father or else may choose another one for himself. (The wife always takes the soul-father of her husband.) The soul-father serves as an agent of moral control by prescribing penance for his confessants when he learns of such infractions of the Christian rules as breaking the fasts.

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

brides be virgin. Related norms greatly restrict their quest for romantic love. Since Ethiopian society still expects its maidens to be shy and retiring, and to avoid social relations with boys outside their families, the boys find few opportunities for getting to know members of the opposite sex. Even in those few situations where sociability between the sexes is publicly permitted, ingrained tendencies to segregate the sexes persist. The most liberal context for such sociability, the University College campus, has witnessed relatively little interaction between male and female students. In spite of their occasional resolutions to act more boldly, the college boys have in the past tended to shy away from the co-eds except during such rare formal events as a college dance or off-campus parties.

This is not to say that modern adolescent males have no opportunity for premarital sexuality. On the contrary, their opportunities in this regard are perhaps better than ever. The proliferation of brothels in Ethiopia's urban centers makes sexual initiation easy, almost a routine event.* Students also frequent these houses for social entertainment, dancing to swing and Latin rhythms, and sipping beer or soft drinks. Thus the continued sanctions against social intercourse in more respectable forms work to sharpen the Amhara dichotomy between decency and sexuality, and leave modern boys with a double standard that separates the marriageable girls from the enjoyable ones.

The idea that marriage should be founded on romantic love has brought greater anxiety as well as hope into the lives of Ethiopian adolescents. This anxiety is due in part to the above-mentioned inhibitions against that easy commerce of the sexes which so facilitates the discovery of a suitable love object. It also reflects a certain ambivalence toward the new ideal, based on a lingering attachment to the authority of the old system. This was manifest, for example, in the response to a college debate on the topic, "Resolved: that the custom of letting the parents choose a spouse for the children should be maintained," that took place in 1959. Although on anonymous questionnaires *90 per cent* of the college students said they will probably decide whom to marry themselves, and only 3 per cent said the decision would be made by parents or other relatives, in voting on the matter after the debate the students (in contrast to the judges who awarded the negative debaters) publicly declared themselves 42 per cent affirmative, 41 per cent negative, with 17 per cent abstaining.

Anxiety regarding the new conception of marriage, finally, is also connected with a new-fashioned fear of divorce. The mind of the modern adolescent vacillates between the ideal of an abiding marital relationship based on

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*Due perhaps to the greater importance of their peers, sexual accomplishments have now become a frequent topic of conversation and a matter for boasting among modern adolescent boys.

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

love and the image of the traditional Amhara marriage, likely as not to end in divorce. This sort of concern was expressed in a revealing way in the following statement by a twenty-year-old college student:

> The main thing I want in my wife is good character. Beauty is not so important. Of course she will be an excellent cook. But mostly I am concerned that she be the *right* one for me; I do not want to get divorced. But you can't really know if she is the right one until after ten years of married life. If after having about five or six children it turns out troublesome, I will have to leave her. A person cannot go on living that way.

In some instances, ironically, this quest for the perfect marriage leads to a rejection of the very institution of marriage itself. Seven per cent of the students questioned indicated that they do not want to get married eventually—either because they "could never afford it," they "would be happier living single," or they just *"do not want to enter a relation that will end in divorce."* Thus at a time when the stability and warmth of family life are needed more than ever, the very possibility of family is doubted.

Some Ethiopian students blame the deteriorated family and an alleged increase in divorce in their country on the impact of Western civilization. True, the introduction of the Western concept of marriage and of the rudiments of a modern occupational system have dislocated the traditional arrangements for marriage; and other related problems, to be discussed in the next chapter, plague the Western-educated elite. But Western civilization has also developed resources to begin to cope with analogous problems in its own societies, and perhaps it is not too soon to acquaint Ethiopia's youth with some of these: for example, the recent developments in man's understanding of the dynamics of marriage as well as more sophisticated conceptions of the ideal and importance of family life in modern society.

CULTURAL ORIENTATION

A generational conflict manifests itself further with respect to questions of belief, taste, and value. Because of differences on such issues, students and their parents have grown far apart. The more traditionalist of the older generation refer to the modern youth as *ya-ʾAmmʾIntaññā shi J̌ǰotch* ("children of the eighth millennium"); that is, of that corrupt time the Amhara believe will precede the destruction of the world. The latter, in turn, refer to the old-fashioned as ignorant, uncivilized, sometimes even "savage."

Yet, as we have been suggesting, this conflict is by no means total. Amhara adolescents are too deeply attached to many aspects of their traditional culture to engage in wholesale rebellion. Because of strict childhood training they remain basically respectful toward their elders. In addition, they often prefer to champion their own traditions in the spirit of a freshly excited nationalism.

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

shown by the vagueness of Amhara kin terminology. The term for brother, *wandam*, also applies to all the male relatives of one's generation and even to one's close friends. Similarly, the terms for uncle and aunt (*agot* and *akeste*) are sometimes used for nephew, niece, and cousin as well; and often these terms are simply replaced by the abstract generic word for kin, *zamad*. The extent of reciprocal obligations among kin outside the nuclear family is a function primarily of the amount of spontaneous affection that exists among the individuals concerned and how close they happen to live to each other. Relatives on good terms with one another normally take turns visiting one another and eating together on holidays. They help one another in the event of sickness, death, fire, litigation, and murder. Orphaned or economically burdensome children are often farmed out to the households of more successful relatives.

These activities are based on voluntary reciprocity or good will. In its formal structure, the Amhara kinship system stresses the independence of the nuclear family. Although it occasionally happens that married brothers live in a single large compound under the moral authority of their father or an older brother, who is known as its *alaqā* and is responsible for the compound's payment of taxes, each nuclear family lives in separate quarters and produces and consumes its own supply of food by working its own separate acreage of land.

Within the nuclear family itself, the ties that bind are limited by certain fundamental safeguards of individual rights. One is the institution of private property. The land which each partner brings into a marriage or later acquires through bequests remains his own until death. If they should separate, each takes his own land, and the goods acquired by the household during their marriage are divided equally between them. There is also the provision of *gīl*, a quantity of property that either or both of the spouses may designate, prior to getting married, as strictly private property and indivisible in case of divorce. In the event that a nuclear family enters one of the modern savings associations or *equb* (to be discussed below), husband and wife join as separate members.

The possibility of divorce is another safeguard of individual rights within the nuclear family. Only in the *querbān* type of marriage is divorce forbidden. This form is normally restricted to priests and very devout, usually older, people; and even then divorces sometimes occur, the couple preferring the displeasure of the church to a life of continued antagonism. The standard sort of marriage is the *zamānya* or contract form, in which the equivalent of a simple "I do" concludes the match and a simple "I do not" legitimates divorce. The divorce may be initiated by either husband or wife. An Amharic

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

proverb which stresses the rights of women in this regard gives the following advice:

Balāgar sitagab yematall ba-degger;
Tayawennā nay qitāwen yegāgger.

When a peasant gets sated he beats you with wood;
Leave and come home, let him bake his own bread!

A couple who have firmly decided upon divorce need simply call in their relatives or go before the *çhĭqā shum* in order to have their property properly divided. The only recourse to judicial process is when, as often happens, disputes break out concerning the division of property. In the *damoz* form of marriage, in which there is no civil oath, divorce is yet simpler. The wife is given certain presents and a monthly salary for the duration of the marriage. When the husband has to leave for another part of the country, or if the couple quarrel, they simply separate without further ado.

Despite its heavy claim on the energies of its members, then, the Amhara kinship system is such as to make members of the nuclear family relatively independent of extended relationships, and to give the individual marriage partners important areas of independence from each other.

Religious Organization

Membership in the Monophysite Church is automatic for all Amhara except a small percentage who are Muslim. This membership is symbolized by the ceremony of baptism, performed for male infants on the fortieth day and for females on the eightieth. At that time the child receives a special Christian name in addition to his regular family name.

Certain obligations are incumbent upon every member of the church. Foremost among these is the requirement of fasting, which begins for children of both sexes at about the age of seven and introduces a considerable element of constraint into the lives of the Amhara. Second, there is the obligation to observe the Sabbaths and the main holidays by refraining from arduous physical labor on those days. In addition, each household is obliged to contribute a certain quantity of grain to the local church every year.*

Apart from the rigorous fasting requirements, and the injunction not to work on holy days—a dubious hardship—the individual is relatively free of ritual obligations. The rituals demanded by the church are so manifold, and so sacred, that responsibility for them is given to the clergy, and the laymen

*In some areas this is a fixed amount per household (*e.g.*, one or two *gasasa*); in others it is proportionate to the wealth of the family. It is collected by a lay official of the church, the *gwal alaqā*, though sometimes by the *gabaz*.

holds priest land because he is a ristena of a founding ambilineage of the parish, his son's ordination means that the lands or payments until now turned over to a stranger priest (in lieu of a ristena priest) can be kept within the family.

The durability of the ties which bind a priest to his natal parish are reinforced by his marriage. Most peasants are married in a "secular union" (yaluwkurban migabat), which excludes neither divorce not extra-marital sexual adventures.[21] The priest, on the other hand, must be married, and it can be only as a "communion marriage" (bikurban migabat), an indissoluble sacrament of the Church which commits the spouses to sexual fidelity and forbids even remarriage. Thus, the priest is cut off from carousing in the talla houses of the town. He must instead confine his comraderie to the courtyard of the parish church, separated from the persons and experiences which might otherwise lead him away from his parish fields.

Thus enrollment in the parish school is conceived

[21] Two other forms of marriage, associated with a man on travels or living in town, are yidomoz migabat (which lasts for a contractual period) and yilijinat (providing only exclusive sexual rights to the woman).